

The idea of human life is autocracy under a reckoning theocracy, the control of self under the control of God; and a man has reached the age of mastery through limitation when he comes to where he is able to control himself, and through the mastery of himself to the mastery of his environment. Always a man is a victim of his environment until he has come to be master of himself.

The Negro Problem, the Problem of Society

The Negro problem of this country is the problem of society, the solution is the problem of all human life. It makes the history of the human race, of nations and individuals. You will find the same problem the world over, in every country and in every condition of life.

I am asked to speak this morning of the negro as a free man, as to his condition as a free man. I agree with what General Howard has said, that he must enter into his freedom as a man, that he entered into his freedom as a man. But he came too suddenly. It was an acquired freedom that was suddenly thrust upon him, not a freedom coming from development, and the first thing that was thrust upon him as a free man was responsibility, — responsibility to himself, responsibility to his fellow-man, responsibility to his God. He was responsible no longer to a master, who thought for him and acted for him. He was responsible to human society because related to men about him, and he must, therefore, be now an integral part of society in the larger, broader, deeper sense of that word "society." And then responsibility to God—he was to have his own religion; he had a religious responsibility. He is a man, in other words, with a man's responsibilities.

The Consciousness of Insufficiency

And then I think there came to the Negro what comes to every man, and to every race at this stage of his development, the consciousness of his insufficiency. I cannot look as far back as some. I am too late a product to know about the problem that came immediately after the war. I am led to believe that the most pitiful spectacle that the world has ever looked on was the spectacle of the human race for eighteen or twenty years succeeding the freedom of the Negro people.

I remember, the morning after my graduation from college, with years of training, with all the influences and all that life brought to me on the morning of my graduation, I stepped out into life with its responsibilities thrust upon me, and I never felt

more like a fool before or since,— inadequate to the problem, inexperienced, not feeling myself equal to the men about me who had experience.

Processions of Inefficiency

That was the problem of the Negro race. Processions of inefficiency! The effect of that was, first, a denial of himself to himself, a denial of his responsibilities — not a rejection of his freedom but a denial of his responsibilities, then the assumption toward society of an attitude of irresponsibility. I look back to the day when the Negro was first free and I find that his attitude toward society was one of utter irresponsibility. And then there came as a necessary sequence of all this, the substitution of an emotion, the call for moral responsibility. We had loved that the Negro should shout at meeting. Our religion was the religion of non-emotion.

So there came about the substitution of the emotional for the moral responsibility, and then there came the loss of respect through license. Liberty became license, and liberty was lost; for, from being the slave of the white master, he became the slave of himself. A slave without the cry for freedom. That is the history of the years that lie between 1865 and to-day. For many of them are still the slaves to self as they were of the white man.

A Student of this Problem

It was as late as 1890 when I first became a student of this problem. My first impression was that there had been little revolt against his own slavery. The Negro had not come to the place where he revolted against this slavery. And so the characterization of the Negro race up to 1890 was distrust, and a lack of any sort of social status within the race. About 1896 I noticed the beginning of a change. There was the beginning of better organization and education. I think I had my attention first called to it by going back to Georgia and finding who was trusted to work on the plantation. My mother trusted the Negroes on the plantation. It was an awakening of moral sense, and I observed it in 1896.

There are two principles, underlying principles, which have been back of our effort, and one is the idea of liberty, absolute, personal liberty; unrestrained liberty; pure democracy; and the other is the Roman idea of law, masterful, compelling law. I think these two principles have been in use and have had their day. But the best principle is that of law restrained, liberty restrained; liberty restrained by law and law defined by liberty.